

MEMORANDUM FOR: All NOAA Employees

FROM: John Pierson  
Director, NOAA Safety and Environmental Compliance Office

DATE: 2 November 2005

SUBJECT: NOAA Safety Lessons Learned #06-01

NOAA's Safety and Environmental Compliance Office (SECO), in conjunction with the NOAA Safety Council, is responsible for promoting a safe working environment for NOAA's employees and contractors. While we continue to place an emphasis on ensuring NOAA's working environments (facilities, platforms) are safe, we are increasingly emphasizing the role each employee plays in engaging in safe behavior--for both their own well-being and those co-workers around them. As part of our effort to promote safer employee behavior in the workplace, we will be publishing periodic lessons learned from both NOAA and other agencies where we feel the lesson may be applicable to NOAA's workforce and working environments.

The following is the first such lessons learned.

Recently on the morning of a calm, partly cloudy day, while enroute to conduct a NOAA operational mission, employees in a 17ft Boston Whaler encountered the wake created by a ship passing in front of their small boat. Two of the employees sitting in the bow were tossed about and sustained injuries, one individual sustaining serious facial injuries.

Trained NOAA staff conducted an investigation of this incident pursuant to NOAA's Incident Investigation Process and determined that, as the small boat was about to cross the ship's wake, the small boat operator failed to reduce the boat's speed to minimize the impact, nor were there any verbal warnings issued to caution the crew of the oncoming wakes.

This incident should serve as a reminder to all small boat operators and passengers to:

- 1 - Remain alert and aware of their surroundings while traveling in a small boat.
- 2 - When the boat is about to change speed, direction, or traverse wakes, a verbal warning shall be issued by the small boat operator and heeded by the entire crew in order to minimize the potential for injury by being thrown off balance.
- 3 - When approaching wakes the speed of the boat should be adjusted in order to safely negotiate the wakes. In most cases, this means reducing the speed of the boat.
- 4 - All operators should become familiar with the boat they are operating to include what maneuvers are necessary when negotiating wakes in order to keep the crew safe.

If you have any questions or would like additional information regarding NOAA Small Boats Program please visit NOAA's Small Boat Program website ([www.sbp.noaa.gov](http://www.sbp.noaa.gov)) or contact LCDR Douglas Schleiger, NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator at (206) 526-4048. If you have any questions or would like additional information about NOAA's Incident Investigation Process please visit NOAA's Safety and Environmental Compliance Office website ([www.seco.noaa.gov](http://www.seco.noaa.gov)), or contact Mr. Tom Altvater, NOAA's Safety Officer at (301) 713-2870.

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